

Pillsbury Milling Complex
Main and Second streets Southeast
between Third and Fifth avenues
Minneapolis
Hennepin County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-29-5

HABS
MINN,
27-MINAP,
3-A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PILLSBURY MILLING COMPLEX

HABS No. MN-29-5

Location: Main and Second streets Southeast
between Third and Fifth avenues

USGS Minneapolis South Quadrangle, Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates: Zone 15;
480100:4981060; 480320:4980940;
480260:4980800; 480040:4980940

Present Owner: The Pillsbury Company
Pillsbury Center
200 South Sixth Street
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

Present Occupant: The Pillsbury Company

Present Use: Grain milling, processing and packaging

Significance: Containing some of the most imposing structures
on Main Street, the Pillsbury Milling Complex,
still operative, symbolizes the role of
Minneapolis as a major U.S. Flour Milling
Center from 1880-1930.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

See MN-29-5-A-H for specific information on the
individual structures in the Pillsbury Milling Complex.

B. Historical Context:

The year was 1881 and C.A. Pillsbury & Company, under the energetic
direction of Charles A. Pillsbury astonished the milling world with
the completion of the largest and most modern flour mill in history.
The Pillsbury "A" Mill of Minneapolis was the result of one's
determination to lead all others in his profession, combined with the
talent, drive and loyalty of those who worked for and with him. The
"A" Mill was an industrial and architectural masterpiece, a standard
from which all others would be measured and against which all others
would compete. Yet the most remarkable fact is that this achievement
is part of only the beginning of the sturdy Pillsbury tradition that
has spanned 105 years.

The story of the great "A" Mill and the line of men that lace its legacy began in the mid-1800's when the northwest region was being converged upon by Indians, explorers, speculators and robust, adventurous men in search of new lands to conquer and virgin vistas to take and tame.

One of those men was John Sargent Pillsbury of New Hampshire who in 1855 arrived at the bustling industrial center called St. Anthony which would later come to be called Minneapolis. He opened a general merchandise and hardware business on Main Street and with the hustle he learned as a printing apprentice at the age of 15, made the store grow and prosper quickly. Two years later, a fire intensified by a strong wind, totally destroyed the uninsured building and Pillsbury lost \$48,000 in property and merchandise. He spent the next six, difficult years paying off his creditors and rebuilding his retail hardware business. During this period John Pillsbury's entrepreneur senses had focused on the busy Flour Mills that edged the city's waterfront. In 1869 after regaining his financial footing and attaining status around the state that would lead to his election as governor three times, John Pillsbury gave in to a compelling foresight. He sent back east for his bright young nephew, Charles A. Pillsbury.

Charles arrived in the midwest fresh out of college and with a new bride in the spring of that year. On June 4, 1869, he bought into a 200 barrels-a-day, money losing, broken down flour mill with Wells Gardner and George Crocker. The two men thought they had taken a sucker for a \$10,000 ride. Although Charles knew nothing about the milling business, his confidence in its future and his knack for grasping knowledge and implementing new ideas was incredible.

Young Pillsbury quickly concerned himself with the alleged inferiority of spring wheat flour as compared to the wheat product. He felt that the machinery and not the wheat was to blame. Under his management, millers and machinists improved a device called a middlings purifier that cleaned and graded the middlings from the cracked wheat and retained more of the high food value in the wheat berry for grinding into the flour.

The spring wheat consequently became more popular because of this "High Grinding" process and at the end of the first year the mill turned a profit and the Pillsbury seed of success was planted. Pillsbury and Gardner formed a firm after Crocker sold out in 1870 and they leased the Alaska Mill which almost doubled the milling capacity of the firm. In 1871 the Alaska was purchased and the C.A. Pillsbury & Company was formed.

In 1872 Charles Pillsbury registered in Washington, D.C. the famous "Pillsbury's Best", trademark with the dotted circle and the four X's that meant in his words, "that Pillsbury's Best is really the best".

In 1874 he began testing a crude new milling process from Budapest, Austria Hungary that used steel rollers to crack wheat instead of cumbersome mill stones.

In 1875 Charles Pillsbury's brother, Fred C. Pillsbury, joined the company with their uncle John S. Pillsbury, who sold his hardware business to buy the Anchor Mill and lease it to his nephew. That year Charles also leased the Empire Mill and remodeled the Alaska and called it the Pillsbury "B" Mill.

In 1879 after five years of intense but secret planning, Charles Pillsbury, in the 10th year of his milling operations, announced that he would build the largest and the most advanced mill the world had ever known.

He had done extensive traveling to study the leading mills and the best techniques all over America and the world. He poured over information of every phase of the milling industry and considered numerous plans for new mill construction, the newest innovations in machinery and transportation of wheat and the making of flour and its byproducts.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

See MN-29-5-A-H for specific information on the individual structures in the Pillsbury Milling Complex.

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

See MN-29-5-A-H for specific information on the individual structures in the Pillsbury Milling Complex.

Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was prepared as a class project for Architecture 5143, Historic Building Research and Documentation, a class offered in the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The class project was prepared under the direction of Professor Foster W. Dunwiddie in cooperation with the State Historic Preservation Office of the Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, Minnesota. Historical data was compiled by F.J. Sabongi and Robert Shilts, University of Minnesota, April 1987.